

Minutes of Worcester Board of Election Commissioners meeting Feb 6, 2012

Call to order by Chair Dube at 5:35 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call

Commissioners present:

**Chairperson Mary Anne Dube
Commissioner John Goggins
Commissioner David LaPierre
Commissioner Diane Mohieldin
Commissioner Robert Winant**

Commissioners absent:

None

Chair Dube called for a motion to accept the minutes from the Jan 9, 2012 meeting. Commissioner Goggins made a motion to accept and Commissioner LaPierre seconded. The minutes were unanimously accepted.

Old Business:

The first item of old business concerned follow up on HR1972. Mr. Rushford noted that Solicitor Moore had not yet provided his opinion and summarized what was known about the bill. He noted that it was meant to address the current election cycle and that further action on the bill would not be taken this year. Commissioner LaPierre made a motion to table the item for 3 months. The motion was seconded and accepted.

The second item of old business was follow up on the December 28, 2011 letter from Bonnie Johnson. Chair Dube opened with a brief discussion on the legal opinion from Solicitor Moore regarding petitions from the public and who can place items on the agenda. A brief discussion regarding what the Board had done and that while some Commissioners felt the issues had been discussed and addressed, at least two others felt further follow up was warranted. Ms. Johnson was asked if she would like to speak further on the matter and she did request permission. She was asked to limit her time to 3 minutes by Chair Dube but requested a little more time. Commissioner LaPierre made a motion to allow her 10 minutes and Commissioner Winant seconded it. The board accepted the motion and Ms. Johnson went through the remaining points of her letter. The key points were:

1. At one precinct, a poll worker consistently communicated with voters in Spanish. This brought up a question on whether it is permissible for poll workers to address voters in a language other than English?
2. There were instances observed at several polling locations where voters provided a name to an Inspector and when the Inspector couldn't find the name in the voter rolls, he or she would suggest another name at the address given by the voter. The voter would then agree that was their name and receive a ballot. When the Warden or Clerk was notified of such activity, they did inform the Inspectors this was not allowed, but Ms. Johnson was concerned that this is a habit that may continue.
3. She noted an instance where electioneering material had been left in plain sight at a polling location and it was not disposed of properly, but left in a location where it could be seen by voters.
4. Repeated instances where a voter gives their address and the Inspector then provides the name, rather than the voter.
5. She requested information on who is authorized to bring absentee ballots in and how that information is recorded at the Elections Office.
6. She would like an explanation of how the hand count works as she is not very familiar with the process.
7. Wardens had noted to her that it was difficult to get the Welcome Letter read the morning of the elections because of all the preparation that needs to be done and was wondering if that could be addressed in a better way.
8. The schedule of training sessions for Wardens and Clerks is made close to the election and is provided during regular working hours. She was wondering if sessions could be scheduled for some evenings or even on a Saturday morning for those who are unable to get time off from work.

After her presentation, a detailed discussion regarding the points made ensued.

Regarding point 1, it was noted that there is no law or regulation regarding what language poll workers should address voters in and that several individuals had actually been selected to work at the polls because they were multi-lingual and could assist voters as needed. It was also noted that recent US Department of Justice regulations require a certain percentage of poll workers be fluent in Spanish.

Regarding point 2, it was noted that this issue will be addressed in the training as part of a role playing exercise.

Regarding point 3, it was suggested that this issue be noted to the police officers who would be at the polls prior to them being dispatched to the polling locations.

Regarding point 4, it was noted that the law allows for delivery of absentee ballots by nursing homes and that the law actually allows members of the same household to bring in absentee ballots.

After the discussion of the above points, it was noted that Ms. Johnson had brought up similar issues over the past several months and she was asked what could be done to address her concerns further, other than what had already been done. Mr. Rushford addressed several of her points and noted what had been done and would be done to address them.

A question was brought up on whether the items in the Good Morning letter could be noted to the Wardens and Clerks prior to the morning of the election. It was noted by Mr. Rushford and Mr. Meduna that important items that can be addressed prior to the morning of the election are provided to the Wardens and Clerks, but there may be last minute issues that need to be addressed and are those are placed in the Good Morning letter.

A question was raised regarding the availability of training material for review. Mr. Meduna noted that all the training material is available for review online and Mr. Rushford noted that all new workers are required to take the training provided online and all returning workers are reminded to review the material. This information is conveyed to them in the letters they receive regarding their appointment as poll workers.

New Business:

The one item of new business concerned consideration of polling location changes for Ward 3 Precinct 2, Ward 9 Precinct 4, and Ward 10 Precinct 3. Ward 10 Precinct 3 would be moved to 50 Murray Avenue. Ward 3 Precinct 2 would be moved to 40 Belmont Street, and Ward 9 Precinct 4 would be moved to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church at 2 Airport Drive. The reasons for the proposed moves are noted in a letter from Mr. Rushford to the Board dated February 2, 2012 along with a follow up letter dated February 6, 2012. Those letters are attached.

The main focus of discussion was on the proposed move of Ward 9 Precinct 4. The polling location for Ward 9 Precinct 4 had been moved within the recent past and there was concern that voters would be upset at having to go to a new location within such a relatively short time frame. Mr. Rushford proposed that a public hearing was a possibility, but it would, of course, delay any move prior to the March 6, 2012 elections. It was proposed that the District Councilor be approached about the proposed move and his feedback sought. A motion was made by Commissioner Goggins to approach the District Councilor on this issue to determine his feelings and Commissioner LaPierre seconded it. The motion was approved and Mr. Rushford will approach the Councilor on February 7. Provided the Councilor has no objections, the Board has approved the move.

After some brief discussion about possible traffic and parking issues at 40 Belmont, the Board voted to accept the moves of the polling locations Ward 3 Precinct 2 and Ward 10 Precinct 3.

The next meeting will be held March 12, 2012 at 5:30p.m.

Commissioner Mohieldin offered a motion for adjournment and Commissioner LaPierre seconded it. The meeting adjourned at 6:35 p.m.